

# GORGONIA FLABELLUM?



## CHARACTER GENERICUS.

*Flores* Hydræ, sparsi e poris lateralibus.

*Stirps* radicata, cornea, continuata, ramosa; basi explanata, cortice obducta.

*Lin. Syst. Nat.* p. 1289.

Class: *Vermes*.

## CHARACTER SPECIFICUS, &c.

GORGONIA reticulata ramis interne compressis, cortice flavo?

*Lin. Syst. Nat.* p. 1293.

FRUTEX MARINUS ELEGANTISSIMUS?

*Clus. exot.* 120.

FLABELLUM VENERIS.

*Ellif. corall.* p. 61. t. 26.

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De corallii in hac tabula depicti natura et ortu, nomine Flabelli marini cogniti, plurimum disceptavere Philosophi; incerti quo in ordine entium debeat reponi. Multas hujus classis species scriptores antiqui et recentiores ut vegetabilia descripserunt; at a seriis et sedulis investigationibus doctorum hominum tandem compertum est vera esse animalia, vegetabilia tantum  
structura

structura sua referentia, ab animalium incolentium labore ita efficta. Vetat instituti mei brevitās varia in hanc quæstionem Physicorum argumenta proferre. Qui plura desiderat Acta Philosophica Anglica et Gallica, præcipue vero scripta Ellisii consulat. Substantias omnes marinas, communiter nomine Coralliorum et Corallinarum distinctas, cum paucis aliis diversæ indolis animalibus, digerit Linnæus in duas divisiones, Lithophyta scilicet et Zoophyta. In Zoophytis animalis natura multo magis præpollet : nam hæ substantiæ (ut et nomen vult) ex animalibus et vegetabilibus compositæ sunt : in Lithophytis materia calcaria et lapidea magis dominatur. Lithophyta corallium quod incolunt revera ædificasse creduntur, ut patet in madreporis et in aliis coralliis lapidosis. Zoophyta autem ut putat Linnæus, sunt veræ plantæ, floribus animatis præditæ, peculiari Naturæ consilio a ramusculis in formam polyporum se pandentibus. Dubitari merito potest sitne hæc Linnæi idea vere Philosophica. Verisimilior fortasse Ellisii opinio, qui vult partem vulgo vegetabilem reputatam, esse meram basin, ab animalibus incolentibus effictam.

Hæc animalia forma sua ad genus Hydræ, seu Polypi accedunt. Genus Gorgonia, ad quod præsens species pertinet, est forte omnium Zoophytorum elegantissimum. Plurimas continet species, inter quas aliæ sunt simplices, seu vix ramosæ ; aliæ valde ramosæ, et aliæ etiam reticulatæ ; sub quibus hæc ipsa species militat.

Formosum hoc corallium, in littoribus maris Mediterranei, in littoribus etiam Indicis et Americanis reperitur,

reperitur, rupibus aliisque basin securam præbentibus adnatum.

In magnam sæpe crefeit molem, duorum scilicet vel trium pedum : frequenter etiam more elegantissimo proliferum conspicitur. Color ejus generalis purpureus est ; interdum flavus ; nec raro utrifque hisce coloribus variatus. Pars ejus vegetabilis est coloris obscure cornei seu fusci ; pars calcaria seu carnea, quam incolunt animalia, est, ut antea dictum, vel flava vel purpurea, et undique tuberculis parvis creberrime obfita, intra quæ, si recens sit Zoophytum, vivunt Hydræ parvulæ.

*Fig. 1.* Pars ramuli leviter aucti, cum tuberculis, seu Hydrarum cellulis.

*Fig. 2.* Hydra ipsa, magnitudine aucta.

THE  
FAN GORGONIA,  
OR  
VENUS'S FAN.



GENERIC CHARACTER.

The *Flowers* Polypes, dispersed from the lateral branches.

The *Stem* rooted, horny, continued, branchy ; flattened at the base, covered with a bark.

*Lin.*

SPECIFIC CHARACTER, &c.

RETICULATED GORGONIA, with the ramifications internally compressed, and the bark yellow (or purple).

*Lin.*

VENUS's FAN.

*Ellis's Zoophytes, p. 92.*

SEA-FAN.

*Ellis's Corallines, p. 60.*

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The object figured on this plate, and generally known by the name of the Sea-Fan, is one of those numerous productions which are not more remarkable for the singularity of their appearance, than for the different opinions



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opinions which have arisen amongst philosophical enquirers, relative to their real nature, and the rank which they should hold in the scale of beings. Many of the species of this class have, by the ancient writers and several of the moderns likewise, been described as vegetables; but from the unwearied attention of some learned naturalists to this subject, it was at length discovered, and seems now pretty generally admitted, that they are in reality of an animal nature, and that the strong resemblance which many of them bear to vegetables, is to be considered as entirely owing to the operation of the animals which formed them.

In a publication of this nature, it will not be expected, that a particular investigation of the arguments on both sides of this curious subject should be introduced: we shall therefore refer such of our readers who may wish for more circumstantial descriptions, to the Philosophical Transactions, the Memoirs of the French Academy; and more particularly to the works of the late Mr. Ellis, where the fullest information may be found.

The whole tribe of the marine substances, known by the general names of Corals and Corallines, (with some animals of a different kind,) are arranged in the Linnaean System under two divisions, *viz.* Lithophyta and Zoophyta. In the latter of these, or Zoophytes, the animal nature predominates more apparently than in the former; and indeed these beings (as the name imports) seem rather to be a composition of animal and vegetable; whereas in the Lithophytes, or other Linnaean division, the stony or calcareous part predominates

nates greatly over the animal one. The Lithophytes are considered as the actual builders of the substance which they appear to inhabit, as in the Madreporcs, and other hard or stony corals; but the Zoophytes are (according to the Linnæan idea) to be considered as a kind of real vegetables, furnished with animated flowers, which, by a peculiar process of nature, display themselves from the ramifications in the form of real animals of the Polype tribe.

Whether this idea be strictly philosophical may well be questioned; and perhaps the opinion of Mr. Ellis, *viz.* that the ramified or supposed vegetable part, is a meer basis or support formed by the animals which inhabit it, is the most probable opinion of the two.

These animals are generally of an appearance more or less resembling the Hydra, or Polype genus. The genus Gorgonia, to which our present subject belongs, is one of the most elegant of the Zoophyte tribe. It contains a great number of species, some of which are nearly of a simple or unbranched structure, while others are very much ramified, and some are also reticulated; it is in this latter division of the genus, that this species is to be arranged.

This beautiful coral is found on the coasts of the Mediterranean, and those of both the Indies; adhering to rocks or other substances, which may afford it a steady basis.

It is frequently of a very large size, *viz.* two or three feet in length; and it is often proliferous in a most elegant manner. Its general colour is a beautiful purple, tinged with yellowish; but in point of colour



lour, it varies extremely ; some specimens being seen almost all purple, others all yellow, or variegated with purple branches and veins.

The vegetable part or stem is of a very dark horn-colour, or brown ; the animal part consists of the calcareous yellow or purple incrustation ; thickly beset with small protuberances, in each of which is a cavity, which, (in the recent coral) is the habitation of a small Polype.

*Fig. 1.* A small detached part, slightly magnified, shewing the cells in which the Polypes reside.

*Fig. 2.* The Polype itself slightly magnified.